

Demoted Up

By VIRGINIA L. MAXWELL

Somehow Janet's mother could not quite forget the stigma which she accused her daughter of putting on the family name when she married Gerald Cummings, their neighbor's chauffeur.

"Janet, my child, do you realize what you have done?" she remembered her mother saying with an awe-stricken face when they both came back from the short honeymoon trip, and Janet's family had since had time to digest the telegraphed news.

And Janet, then a girl of twenty, had faced her mother resolutely.

"Of course I know what I've done, mother. I've married the best man in the world."

"What's the use?" Mrs. Hemingway complained that same evening when Janet's father looked in at the young people seated in the drawing room, and smiled knowingly.

"Janet is too young to know that she has committed a grave social error in marrying beneath her class," Mrs. Hemingway continued. "And as for



Could Scarcely Believe His Words.

the man she chose, well—he will never be anything but a chauffeur."

But the idea rankled in Mrs. Hemingway's mind for a long while after. Janet took a firm stand! They furnished a comfortable, though plain little flat and began to live the "happy ever after" period of their lives.

True, the furnishings of the modest flat did not compare with the cheapest in the Hemingway household, but as Janet reminded her mother, "wasn't it the love behind a household that made it a home, and not the mere material things?"

And after that Mrs. Hemingway decided to let the matter rest.

Two years later found Janet and Gerald more comfortably established than ever. Gerald had got a better position in an automobile firm and the work gave him more regular hours. But there was a lot of time wasted. Gerald within a short time became an expert mechanic and got another raise.

It was not money, however, that finally bred the sore spot in Janet's heart that had been forming unconsciously for months. It was her mother's silent influence. She never said anything about the affair ever since the day of Janet's last outburst, but the silent influence was there just the same.

Once when she had invited a number of girl friends to tea Janet's mother very tactfully displayed the fact that her daughter had no telephone, and pressed for a reason by her inquisitive friends, Janet had not calmly that it was a source of annoyance. The truth of the matter was they could not quite afford it.

Janet was on the verge of utter discouragement, although there was no real cause for it except this subtle influence preying for the sake of a false pride. The foundation of their little home was at stake! The bomb came a few evenings later.

"Well, sweetie," Gerald said coming in enthusiastically, "I'm going—the big day has come. Netty girl, when our country is calling all its red bloods, and I enlist—tomorrow."

"You—what?" Janet could scarcely believe his words. "Jerry boy, tell me you are fooling. You are—why?" she laughed frantically and turned away as though to belittle the idea as a mere passing fancy.

The next moment she turned toward her husband again. But the expression on his etched features made her realize there was no joking to it.

"I'm going Netty; surely you're glad. Don't stand there and gaze as though I were mad. Don't you realize what it means. Going over to protect you, other women, over there and over here. God, girl!"

But Janet had stopped him with her gesture. "You are mad, Stark mad!" she burst out angrily. "How can you go when you have me to take care of. You know married men don't have to go. What are you thinking of and we just being able to see a horizon financially now?"

And so they argued into the late hours of that evening. Twice Gerald Cummings walked to the front window and peered down at the throng of men who were besieging the enlistment offices on the corner.

He pointed them out to Janet, but she was impassive. "Mad men," she remarked, and shrugged her shoulders. And the final issue came about the next morning. Gerald was firm.

"War is a duty between a man and his God," he said hotly, "not a man and his wife."

Just enough to kindle the flame.

Janet blazed her brown eyes upon him and replied, "Well, if you go, Gerald, you go for good. If you are that stubborn and care for me so little, it's best we know it now. You go, Gerald, and—and—well, we part ways."

Gerald tried a conciliation, but it was futile. He decided to go! A dull period of monotony followed for Janet at the Hemingway establishment, where she had taken refuge after Gerald had gone to camp. But the loneliness of the days she had hitherto filled to the brim with her many household cares seemed to pall. Janet must do something. And so because Anne Dawson was going into the navy as a yeomanette, Janet decided to take up stenography and go, too.

But she was disappointed. Several weeks after she graduated from the business school in the heart of town an order came through for stenographers at the gas defense plant on Long Island. She hesitated. Anne was appointed in the navy. But could she not do the same bit in the army?

Her selfishness in merely wanting to be with her girl friend came to her in full realization one morning when she had seen the first transport of wounded soldiers land, and she hastened to the plant to offer her services. Janet, with the knack of her father's aptitude for business, got along exceedingly well. Meantime the war raged at its fiercest. Battles came thicker and more often, and the yell of the newscast's husky voices on the street corners at every edition of the big metropolitan daily made Janet's flesh creep. Yes, she had read of Gerald's wonderful deed.

She had followed every line of the account of how he had saved a whole squadron by repairing the motor ambulances so rapidly. Janet knew that a new and greater love had come into her life. There was a change, too, in her parents' view. Janet's mother, all conciliatory and one of the chief workers at the war camp community service, said she always knew there were big things in "Jerry."

But Janet had cried herself to sleep that night.

In vain she wrote letters abroad. If only she knew his definite address. She had read where he had been wounded, but no hospital number was given. The Red Cross took down the data she was able to supply them, scant as it was, for she had refused even to see him the day he graduated from the training camp and was ordered over.

That was months before, and a bitter repentance grew in her heart because of it. She had been selfish, narrow minded and vain. The words she had uttered that day he had enlisted burned and seared like blue flame now. But morning banished all the tears, just because there was work to be done, and Janet, dainty from the feather in her little trig hat to her neatly polished shoes, went to the plant to take her place among its many other workers. It was her last trip this day, for orders awaited her to report in Washington.

A word of thanks to her captain for recommending her as most capable, a hastily packed traveling bag, a host of imagination—and Janet was on her way to the great center from which radiated so many executive spokes of the world's war. It was glorious! But the old feeling returned to quell her enjoyment every now and then on the train trip going down.

"Mrs. Cummings—" Sergeant Munsey read a day later from her slip to the lieutenant sitting at the huge oak desk to his right. And Janet had timidly acknowledged the title and mounted the stairway to the next floor with him.

"You are to work for the major, are you not?" he asked, and Janet said she had not been told. "Yes," continued Sergeant Munsey, "the new major arrived yesterday. I guess you'll like him all right, with his flashy smile and good humor always. So much as we have seen of him I don't wonder he was so popular with his men."

But they had reached the doorway of the major's office and Sergeant Munsey stopped.

A somewhat faint yet emotional Janet wheeled the next moment and sat heavily in the chair the major offered. The shoulders had looked familiar, and, yes, the head.

But it was preposterous. And yet—"Thank you, sergeant," Major Cummings said quietly. "I will swear the little lady in, you need not wait."

"Swear me in?" Janet said a bit breathlessly as she turned her wide eyes, radiant but tear-dimmed with happiness on her husband, Jerry.

"Why, yes—a mere custom of the service, Mrs. Cummings," he said haughtily, "but—and there was a note of the Jerry who used to be, 'but if you wish,' he smiled this time, 'I'll swear you in—for life.'"

And as Gerald expressed it a few weeks later when the armistice was signed and they both got their honorable discharges, it was the first time he had ever kissed a stenographer the first day he engaged her, and—the very first time he had ever taken one out to lunch the same day.

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